

see Congress held accountable. We all want the legislative process to be open and be accessible to the American people.

So this week the Democrats get to take a swing at making good on their promises of transparency and accountability, and they're already striking out with their secret slush funds.

By deciding not to include any earmarks in the appropriation bills and instead to slip them in by the dark of night into conference reports, preventing anyone from questioning or challenging their earmarks, they have completely shut off the legislative process to the American people.

Now, let me make it clear that I am not against earmarks. I am more than willing to get up here on the floor and defend each and every earmark that I have ever gotten or tried to get for my district. And I think that all Members should have the opportunity to defend their projects and their requests, but more importantly, tax paying citizens have the right to know exactly how their hard-earned dollars are being spent.

To make this process closed is an insult to taxpayers, and if Democrats have nothing to hide, they should live up to their promise and open the process back up to the American people and hold themselves accountable for their spending.

□ 1020

DEMOCRATS ARE FOCUSED ON THE RIGHT PRIORITIES AND ARE FULFILLING OUR PROMISE TO VETERANS

(Mr. MAHONEY of Florida asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MAHONEY of Florida. Mr. Speaker, this year and in years past, the Bush administration has neglected the needs of America's veterans. In his annual budget request, the President did not propose enough funding for the Veterans Administration to meet the growing needs of our veterans.

Fortunately, the new Democratic Congress did not forget about our veterans. This week, we will bring a Military Construction and Veterans' Affairs Appropriations bill to the floor that provides the largest increase in veterans' health care funding in history. Our bill includes \$600 million for a new initiative for mental health and post-traumatic stress syndrome, so that we can ensure that our veterans and returning soldiers have the facilities and the care they need. The funding bill also provides essential services that will allow these veterans to transition back into their communities.

Democrats know that the Federal Government must keep its promises to the men and women who have defended our Nation. This bill, I am proud to say, lives up to that promise.

INDEPENDENCE PRIZE

(Mr. MCHENRY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MCHENRY. Mr. Speaker, the disastrous effects of our Nation's dependence on foreign oil are being seen in every new tank of gas and every cent we send overseas to pay for Middle Eastern oil. Rising gas prices are a product of rising demand and not enough supply.

The time is now to revolutionize the way we produce and consume energy. That's why I am proposing a 21st Century Manhattan Project to spur the ingenuity of our American private sector, to deliver free market solutions for our Nation's energy problem.

I am introducing legislation to create a \$1 billion prize, the Independence Prize, as I call it, that will go to Americans who develop revolutionary products that substantially reduce our dependence on foreign oil, eliminating our dependence on foreign oil. The Independence Prize provides incentives to American entrepreneurs to get transformational innovation to consumers, and more importantly, put Americans on a path to energy independence. Independence is the key.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

DEMOCRATIC HOUSE WORKING ON BEHALF OF AMERICAN PEOPLE WHILE PRESIDENT OBSTRUCTS PROCESS

(Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, House Democrats have been working in a bipartisan manner to approve important legislation which will have a real impact on the lives of hardworking American families. Unfortunately, President Bush has expressed his opposition to a majority of the bipartisan legislation we have passed.

Last week, Congress sent the President a stem cell research bill that would provide hope for millions of Americans suffering from diseases like cancer, diabetes and Alzheimer's. The final bill promotes lifesaving embryonic stem cell research by increasing the number of stem lines that are eligible to be used for federally funded research.

I would hope the President would not stand in the way of real medical progress and would reconsider his veto threat to this vitally important legislation. The President also opposes legislation passed by the House that would make prescription drugs more affordable for America's seniors. And he also opposes legislation making more affordable student loans for America's teenagers.

Congress cannot move this Nation in a new direction on its own. It's time

for the President to join us, creating a meaningful change for the American people.

LACK OF BORDER FENCE FUNDING

(Mrs. BLACKBURN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, we are hearing illegal immigration is a big debate. There is a lot of passion on this issue.

Last year, Congress took the right step in passing the Secure Fence Act. It was the right thing to do. It puts 800 miles of fencing in place, both physical and electronic borders, on our southern border.

Now, authorizing it is one thing, but paying for it is another matter. That duty has fallen to the new liberal leadership here in the House. Even though they have increased Homeland Security spending by \$2.4 billion, a lot of that is going to go into global warming.

They have cut funding for the fence by \$187 million, compared to last year's budget. You are going to hear a lot about this as we begin our appropriations process today.

As we work on this Homeland Security bill, they will claim to have budgeted \$1 billion for the fence, but they are withholding \$700 million of that while we go through bureaucratic red tape. We have got to be certain we don't hurt the environment, all the while 4,500 illegal immigrants cross the southern border every day.

It is disgraceful. Do not delay the fence. Fund it. Take action in the appropriate matter. The hold-on-to-your-wallet Congress is at it. Stand up for the fence.

PRESIDENT REFUSES TO CHANGE COURSE IN IRAQ DESPITE INCREASING VIOLENCE

(Mr. HODES asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HODES. Mr. Speaker, last week the President's new war czar told the Congress that the troop escalation plan is failing and that the American people should expect sectarian violence in Iraq to continue.

Finally someone in the administration is making sense of the situation on the ground in Iraq, but honesty does not make up for the fact that President Bush continues to stubbornly oppose any change in war policy.

In the wake of the deadliest 2-month period in the war, 231 U.S. service men and women were killed in April and May. The facts on the ground show an increasingly grim picture.

In fact, a recent internal military assessment shows that the U.S. military's plan to secure Baghdad against a rising insurgency is falling far short of its goal. To date, according to the document, only one-third of the Baghdad